

Congresswoman Doris Matsui Introduces Wellness Trust Act

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CONTACT: Alexis Marks or Mara Lee

(202) 225-7163

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Kicks-off National Public Health Week with Legislation to Establish Dedicated Trust Fund to Improve Access to Clinical and Community Prevention Services

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Rep. Doris Matsui (CA-05) kicked-off National Public Health Week today by announcing the introduction of H.R. 1940, the Wellness Trust Act of 2009. The legislation is aimed at fighting chronic diseases such as heart disease, obesity, and hypertension, which accounts for a large and growing percentage of health care spending in the United States. The Wellness Trust Act makes major investments in wellness and prevention spending by establishing a dedicated trust fund within the Health and Human Services Department. This will increase the health system's emphasis on preventive services, and improve access to clinical and community prevention services that reduce the crushing burden of chronic disease.

"The Wellness Trust Act is a long-needed down payment on fixing our broken health care system," said Congresswoman Matsui. "As currently constituted, our health care system is skewed toward treating people once they get sick, not on helping them avoid sickness in the first place. The Wellness Trust Act will begin to change the way we think about health care in this country by prioritizing the kinds of clinical and community-based preventive services that are proven to keep people healthier over the long term. By preventing chronic disease and emphasizing wellness, the Wellness Trust Act can make our health care system more effective for patients, more efficient for providers, and more affordable for the American taxpayer."

According to the Center for American Progress, fewer than half of American adults receive preventive services recommended by trustworthy authorities such as the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force. The omission of preventive

health care from our current system costs the country billions of dollars and millions of lives; almost 70 percent of deaths and costs in the United States can be attributed to chronic diseases like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and cancer. Estimates of the economic and health benefits of increased preventive care run as high as \$474 billion over the next ten years.

"The Wellness Trust would re-focus on our health care system to emphasize disease prevention and health promotion, rather than costly spending on avoidable chronic diseases," stated Karen Davenport, Director of Health Policy for the Center for American Progress. "It is an essential component of health care reform."

H.R. 1940 creates a Wellness Trust Fund that is supported by a dedicated and reliable source of annual revenue. Decisions about what clinical and community-based preventive services should be paid for out of the Wellness Trust Fund would be made by the Wellness Trust's Board of Directors, and incorporate recommendations made by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force as well as other expert prevention bodies. H.R. 1940 also integrates preventive care into the electronic health records mandated by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, enabling patients to track their prevention treatment over time.

"We applaud Congresswoman Matsui for her important leadership to improve the health of Americans. The Wellness Trust Act will help ensure health reform includes a real commitment to disease prevention," said Jeff Levi, PhD, Executive Director of Trust for America's Health. "Keeping Americans healthier is one of the most efficient and effective ways to reduce health care costs in this country. The Wellness Trust could help spare millions of Americans from serious diseases and save billions of dollars in health care costs."

The Wellness Trust Act of 2009 has been co-sponsored in the U.S. House of Representatives by Reps. Bruce Braley (IA—1), Lois Capps (CA—23) and John Sarbanes (MD-3) and has been endorsed by the Center for American Progress and the Trust for America's Health.

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